

Candace at Edmonds Community College Creating Access to Careers in Healthcare (CATCH)

Like many students at CATCH, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, Candace became unemployed due to a layoff in late 2008. At the time, she was a receptionist with no real skill or trade who had not received her GED (General Education Development) and had no interest in going to school any longer than absolutely necessary.

A year later, Candace found herself pregnant and in a domestic violence situation. It was hard to leave someone who was abusive and also her source of income, but after a few tries she finally got away. She stayed with her son's grandmother for a few months while they looked for shelters, and living with her taught her a very important lesson: Don't take no for an answer. After Candace's housing application was denied, instead of taking no for an answer, they met with the housing supervisor who, after a close review, approved the application. Her road to success started that day. She went on to complete her GED and apply to CATCH.

On her first day in CATCH, Candace looked for an excuse to skip Penny's job development class, assuming that it was just another hoop students had to jump through to get their computers. Later she came to realize that this class prepared her for each class and assignment ahead of her. "Not only that, the class conditioned my mind for college and life. Penny's class left me feeling renewed and eager to be the best student I was capable of."

In the class Candace learned about and bonded with her classmates. Even though the class was exhausting, when she got home, she wouldn't rest, but stayed up, doing dishes and cleaning up while processing what she had learned that day and how it applied to her life. "Penny's class was the primer to my success at CATCH. Without taking her class and having an open mind, I wouldn't know the names of many of my cohorts today. I wouldn't have learned so much about myself, and I'd probably still be making excuses as to why my life was at a standstill."

Mid-program, Candace hit a rough patch. Phlebotomy was something she had always wanted to do, but despite loving the class, she failed her skill set. She was pretty upset, but hopeful about being able to retry the skill set. It was a surprise when CATCH announced in an email there would be no more retaking of the skill set since the new class was already filled to capacity with a new student cohort coming in. Up until that moment, Candace had felt CATCH was always there for her whenever she needed anything. Everyone had been such great help. Now this general email to those who had failed the skill exam made her feel like no one cared.

"I truly felt abandoned and hurt. I was so angry that I set myself to fail the entire program. I didn't reply to instructor emails or CATCH calls or emails." For weeks this went on until Candace's housing advocate from Housing Hope (a CATCH partner) reached out to her, telling her that Nora from CATCH had been trying to get in touch with her and the CATCH staff were

worried because they hadn't heard from her. Eventually Candace agreed to meet with Nora, along with her housing advocate and the advocate's manager.

"In that meeting, I learned that no one had forgotten me at all. Because I accepted 'no' instead of taking that email and creating a chance for myself, I missed out on taking my CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) exam with the rest of my class, even though I had passed the academic portion and completed my CNA externship. I—not CATCH— stood in the way of my own certification." Candace also had an opportunity to retake her phlebotomy skill set. She retook and passed her second-chance phlebotomy exam.

Right after that, Candace started an externship at Overlake Hospital Medical Center, where she and the staff connected immediately. She was so successful in her phlebotomy skills that she was encouraged to apply for a job at the hospital before the end of the externship. "A month later, I started as an employee! I love what I do, and I'm honored to be a part of such a well-educated and trained staff."

Candace thanks the CATCH Program for that. "If I didn't have Penny's class to condition me and the efforts to reach out to me, I'd still be holding that grudge, and I would have no job. This program single-handedly changed my life. The CATCH Program gave me a skill that, even in a tough economy, gave me an opportunity to finally be a provider to my son. I'm off state assistance now, and I really feel I have something to contribute. CATCH was a blessing to me. I hope that it can be the same for many others."